

Honolulu Star-Bulletin

Published by Gannett Pacific Corporation

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Published at 605 Kapiolani Boulevard Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

A-14

Friday, November 30, 1984

ABC's Revised Report on CIA Murder Order

In a rare admission, ABC News stated last week that it was unable to substantiate a previously broadcast claim that the CIA ordered the killing of Ron Rewald, the Honolulu businessman who has been charged with swindling investors out of millions of dollars.

The television network broadcast a statement that it had "no reason to doubt the CIA's denial" that it had directed a man named Scott Barnes to kill Rewald. The ABC report of the assassination order originated with Barnes, who said he was working as a guard at the Oahu Community Correctional Center, where Rewald was being held at the time. Barnes said he refused the assignment.

The ABC statement, which amounted to a retraction, followed the filing of a complaint by the CIA with the Federal Communications Commission that ABC News had violated the fairness doctrine with its reports on CIA links to Rewald and his defunct investment firm.

In the wake of the arrest and prosecution of Rewald, there has been a deluge of reports in both the local and national news media focused on the CIA's relations with Rewald. Behind the report of the alleged assassination order was the insinuation that Rewald played such an important role in CIA operations that he had to be killed because he could tell too much.

As we have previously noted, the disclosures about the CIA link seemed to be intended as a smokescreen to divert attention from the charges facing Rewald. According to court-appointed officials who have had access to the Rewald firm's files, his relationship with the CIA was minimal.

The ABC assassination order report was based on information from a questionable source. Our reporters assigned to the Rewald case were not surprised when the assassination story collapsed.

The CIA is not in the habit of discussing its operations in public, so we may never be sure that the full story has been told. However, the complaint to the FCC was an extraordinary attempt by the agency to defend itself against the charges broadcast by ABC — including some that were not retracted. Presumably some matters will be clarified when the Rewald case comes to trial.

The *Star-Bulletin* has reported extensively on the case and will continue to report developments as they occur. We will try to do so impartially and accurately, with due regard for the rights of all concerned and with sensitivity to the danger of being manipulated by interested parties.

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